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Reducing the Negative Effects of Emotion Work in Service Occupations: Emotional Competence
as a Psychological Resource

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Abstract

Emotion work, that is, the regulatory effort to express organizationally desired emotions, is an integral part of service work. The concept of emotional competence encompasses skills that focus on how people deal with and regulate their own affect and that of others. Although focusing on similar processes, there has been a lack of integration between these two concepts. The general hypothesis in this study was that emotional competence can be regarded as an important personal resource in service work because it moderates the relationships between work characteristics, emotional dissonance, and outcome variables. Eighty-four service employees completed a questionnaire on their working conditions and their well-being. In addition, peer-ratings for emotional competence were completed. We found that emotional competence moderated most of the proposed relationships (1) between work characteristics and emotional dissonance, (2) between emotional dissonance and outcome variables, and (3) between work characteristics and outcome variables.

Reducing the Negative Effects of Emotion Work in Service Occupations: Emotional Competence as a Psychological Resource

For many service jobs emotion work is an integral part of the task. Emotion work can be defined as the regulatory effort to express organizationally desired emotions (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Morris & Feldman, 1996). It has been argued that emotion work is a source of work stress and that it taxes the psychological (and physiological) system of the service employee. Indeed, research has repeatedly demonstrated the detrimental effects of emotion work for service employees' well-being (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, & Isic, 1999). Given these results, the question arises of whether factors exist that can protect an employee against these negative effects. Under the heading "psychological resources" (Hobfoll, 2001), stress research has sought to identify factors in the work environment or in the person that buffer against negative stress effects (e.g., Frese, 1999). Although the existence of psychological resources with regard to emotion work may have important implications for personnel selection, training, or job design, research has only begun to address this issue in more detail (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002). One variable that has been discussed by researchers in the field of emotion work as a person-related psychological resource is the employee's ability to deal effectively with affective information, often referred to as "emotional competence" or "emotional intelligence" (e.g., Abraham, 1999; Grandey, 2000; see also Cherniss, 2000; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). However, there are very few studies that empirically connect these emotional abilities and emotion work specifically to service employees (see Wong & Law, 2002 for a managerial context). Thus, to bridge this empirical gap, one of the goals of the current study is to relate both types of concepts, emotional abilities and emotion work, to service employees. More specifically, we tested the hypothesis that emotional competence acts as a buffer against the negative effects of emotion work on employees' well-being. We propose that emotional competence functions

along three lines: (1) It weakens the relationship between work demands and an aversive state called “emotional dissonance”, (2) it attenuates the association between emotional dissonance and more general variables of well-being, and (3) it weakens the direct relationship between workplace demands and well-being. In the following we first discuss the concept of emotional competence. Then, we briefly review the literature on emotion work. Finally, we integrate these two lines of literature and develop our hypotheses.

Emotional competence

Emotional competence is the integrative term for skills that concern the accurate or effective perception, comprehension, regulation, and utilization of affect and affective information. These subskills are closely connected and relate to a single higher-order factor (Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2000; Roberts et al., 2001; Wong & Law, 2002). An alternative label for these skills is “emotional intelligence”. The concept of emotional intelligence has been subject to criticism, especially with regard to its status as a “real” intelligence (e.g., Roberts, Zeidner, & Matthews, 2001). The details of this discussion are beyond the scope of this paper. We agree, however, with the critique that the label “intelligence” is neither necessary nor warranted. Rather, we regard the term “competence” as more suitable. Nonetheless, we regard the idea of an integrative concept for affect-related skills as theoretically promising and, as sound empirical evidence starts to build up (Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004), as useful for understanding workplace-related emotions, cognitions, and behavior.

In this study we apply an indicator approach to emotional competence, that is, instead of assessing emotional competence as a whole, we selected specific variables that are particularly useful for the purpose of the study as indicators of emotional competence. Such an indicator approach was found to be useful in previous studies. (e.g., Ciarrochi, Chan, & Bajgar, 2001; Fox & Spector, 2000; Salovey, Mayer, Goldman, Turvey, & Palfai, 1994; Wong & Law, 2002). The

indicators taken into consideration are perspective taking, regulation of others' affect, and affective self-regulation. These indicators are part of most conceptualizations of emotional competence (cf. Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000) and reflect three of the four dimensions of the Mayer-Salovey model. The utilization dimension is excluded because its definition is unclear and there is no convincing measure available. *Perspective taking* reflects a person's skill to understand the psychological state of others (Davis, 1983). Perspective taking is a central aspect of emotional competence because it is a prerequisite for using other skills effectively. It is necessary for employees because they have to understand the feelings of the customers in order to choose the optimal strategy for dealing with them. The second indicator is the skill to *regulate others' affect*. Once the customer's affective state is assessed and understood, service providers must develop a strategy to regulate customer affect in the desired direction and act upon it. Third, *affective self-regulation* is important for employees because this skill helps them to deal with their own affective state. For example, self-regulation is essential when employees get attacked by angry or irritated customers. As suggested by Grandey (2000; see also Gross, 1998), service employees can use several strategies to regulate themselves, such as redirecting their attention toward the desired affect (e.g., think about pleasant things) or by cognitively changing the meaning of the situation (e.g., appraise an unpleasant situation as a challenge).

Emotion work: Strategies and States

Many service organizations have rules or expectations about which emotions should be displayed by an employee when serving customers. In most service contexts, employees are expected to display positive emotions or certain blends of emotions (e.g., friendliness, excitement), while some specific contexts may also involve more ambiguous or even negatively valenced emotions (e.g., undertakers). In this study, however, we will deal with interactions that require the display of positive emotions. Building largely on Hochschild's (1983) seminal work,

several models of emotion work have been developed. By and large, the models can be divided into two groups. The first group focuses on the *strategies* which people use to deal with emotion work (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2000). More specifically, they describe the antecedents, functions, and consequences of two main strategies which Hochschild (1983) called surface acting (changing the emotional display while leaving the affective state untouched) and deep acting (changing the affective state itself). The second group of models is built around the *psychological state* that is associated with emotion work which is labeled *emotional dissonance* (e.g., Morris & Feldman, 1996; Zapf, Vogt, Seifer, Mertini, & Isic, 1999). Emotional dissonance is defined as the extent to which felt emotion differs from the emotion that should be expressed as required by display rules. For example, a service employee may feel angry when dealing with a nasty customer but has to remain friendly in accordance with the rules of customer orientation. Zapf et al. (1999) argued that emotional dissonance is a stressor that impairs effective fulfillment of the task and as such can become a threat to employees' well-being. In this study, we focus on emotional dissonance rather than on deep or surface acting because this allows us to relate more directly to the central concepts of stress research (e.g., stressor, resources). Nevertheless, it has to be noted that the strategy approach and the state approach to emotion work are conceptually related in the sense that the strategy of surface acting implies a state of emotional dissonance. Also, as suggested by Grandey (2003), "[...] deep acting by definition minimizes emotional dissonance by bringing feelings in line with expressions [...]" (p.89).

Development of Hypotheses

Connecting the domains of emotional competence and emotion work, we argue that emotional competence functions as a psychological resource that helps the employee to deal effectively with the demands of emotion work. Hobfoll (2001) defines resources "as those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that

are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources” (p. 339). More specifically, we propose three avenues through which emotional competence unfolds its influence (see Figure 1).

The Moderator Effect of Emotional Competence on the relationship between Work Characteristics and Emotional Dissonance

General stress research shows that employees’ strain is associated with person and work characteristics. Similarly, research on emotion work has identified several person- and work-related antecedents of emotional dissonance (or surface acting). For example, the employees’ degree of role internalization as well as job autonomy and control all have been shown to correlate negatively with emotional dissonance (Morris & Feldman, 1997; Pugliesi, 1999). In this study we focus on two work characteristics: Emotional demands and time pressure (see Figure 1). The variable emotional demands has been studied repeatedly (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003) and, therefore, is particularly suitable for testing the proposed moderating effect of emotional competence. Time pressure has not been explicitly considered before in the context of emotion work. However, we think it is an interesting supplement because it is a traditional stress variable but also, as we will argue, plays a role in emotional processes in service work and, thus, connects emotion work and general stress research.

Emotional demands are rules of when and in which way emotions must be displayed accurately. These demands reflect organizational and/or professional norms, which the employee acquires in the socialization process and maintains through reward and punishment (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989). Morris and Feldman (1996) argued that the higher emotional demands are, the more difficult it becomes for employees to meet the expectations of the organization. Thus, the probability of emotional dissonance should increase [CHECK]. In line with this proposition,

studies have found a positive link between emotional demands and emotional dissonance (Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Zapf et al., 1999).

We argue that when confronted with increasing emotional demands, employees high in emotional competence should experience less emotional dissonance than employees low in emotional competence. Employees with high emotional competence have the ability to process emotional information quickly and accurately (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Thus, it can be expected that they respond efficiently to the emotional demands of a service situation. One way to this is by quickly adapting their own emotional state to what is required in the particular situation (Grandey, 2000), thus making the occurrence of emotional dissonance more unlikely. A second mechanism has to do with the skill to regulate the affect of customers. Recently, it has been emphasized how important the customer's reaction to an employee's behavior is for the experience of the employee's strain (Côté, in press). Employees with high emotional competence should elicit more positive reactions from customers, which then, via emotional contagion processes (Hatfield, et al., 1994; Pugh, 2001), feed back to the employee, bringing actual feelings more in line with demands of emotional display. All in all, emotional competence should buffer the effects of emotional demands on emotional dissonance. Consequently, for employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association between emotional demands and emotional dissonance than for employees low in emotional competence.

H1: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional demands and emotional dissonance. For employees high in emotional competence there is a weaker association between emotional demands and emotional dissonance than for employees low in emotional competence.

Time pressure is a job demand that results from having an insufficient amount of time to complete a job task (Kinicki & Vecchio, 1994). Past research showed that time pressure is

negatively related to employees' well-being (e.g., Garst, Frese, & Molenaar, 2000; Teuchmann, Totterdell, & Parker, 1999) but no study has empirically investigated the role of time pressure in emotion work. Daily experience tells us that time pressure is an important issue in service occupations. Time pressure is often accompanied by negative emotions (e.g., fear of not meeting the organizational standards, anger about lacking organizational support). These emotions may hinder the display of positive emotions. Also, service employees under time pressure must focus most of their cognitive resources on completing the core task of serving the customer (e.g., offering different options) leaving only limited cognitive resources left for the task of expressing positive emotions (Grandey & Brauburger, 2002; Muraven & Baumeister, 2002). These resources might be depleted even faster in light of the accompanying negative emotions which need to be regulated as well. As a consequence, under chronic conditions of high time pressure it should be more difficult for an employee to reach the organizationally expected level of affect display, thus leading to the experience of generally more emotional dissonance.

We argue that emotional competence moderates the relationship between time pressure and emotional dissonance. Because of their better self-regulating strategies, emotionally competent employees deal effectively with their negative emotions resulting from time pressure, saving resources to be used for the appropriate emotional display. The effective regulation of the customers' affect might strengthen this effect by positive contagion processes (see above). Also, putting the customer in the appropriate affective state may make the service interaction smoother and, thereby, this act may facilitate the easier and faster fulfillment of the customer request, again freeing resources for emotion regulation.

Thus, emotional competence should buffer the effects of time pressure on emotional dissonance. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association

between emotional demands and emotional dissonance than for employees low in emotional competence.

H2: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between time pressure and emotional dissonance. For employees high in emotional competence there is a weaker association between time pressure and emotional dissonance than for employees low in emotional competence.

The moderating effect of emotional competence on the relationship between emotional dissonance and outcomes

On an empirical level, the negative association of emotional dissonance/surface acting and well-being of employees has been repeatedly demonstrated. In general, this relationship has been shown to hold for both psycho-physiological well-being, such as burnout or psychosomatic complaints (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003; Zapf et al., 1999), and evaluative (cognitive) outcome variables, such as job satisfaction or organizational commitment (e.g., Brotheridge & Lee, 2002; Morris & Feldman, 1997; Wong & Law, 2002; Zapf et al., 1999). The negative effects of emotion work on psycho-physiological well-being can be explained by the regulation effort that accompanies emotion work. Regulating emotions, especially by using strategies like inhibition or suppression, taxes the physiological system of individuals due to the increased activity of the autonomous nervous system, which decreases both physiological and psychological well-being (Grandey, 2000; Gross, 1998). These mechanisms might in part explain the negative relationship between emotional dissonance and evaluative variables as well. When employees attribute their chronically reduced well-being to factors related to their job then, consequently, the employees' work-related attitudes should be negatively affected. Also, following an argument by Hochschild (1983), it might be that an employee considers it improper

for the organization to use something as personal as emotions for commercial purposes. Such a perception might lead to reduced job satisfaction (Grandey, 2000).

Although in the context of emotion work the empirical results for psycho-physiological well-being and evaluative outcome variables are similar they do have a slightly different role, as the former is more proximal to affective experiences at work than the latter (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Thus, in our study we include a variable for each type of outcome variable (general well-being, job satisfaction). We argue that emotional competence should weaken the relationship between emotional dissonance and general well-being or job satisfaction. Employees who are more competent in affective self-regulation may be more effective in regulating the aversive state that results from the experience of emotional dissonance, and, therefore, recover more quickly than employees who are less competent. Such effective regulation should prevent the accumulation of negative affect that would otherwise lead to reduced job satisfaction and well-being (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). The emotional contagion effect might apply here as well. Positive emotional signals from the customer might diminish the employee's negative affect and, hence, reduce emotional dissonance more quickly (Côté, in press; Pugh, 2001). Thus, we expect a buffer effect in the sense that for employees high in emotional competence, the negative relationship between emotional dissonance and general well-being/ job satisfaction is weaker than for employees low in emotional competence. Given the theoretical closeness between variables of well-being and workplace attitudes, we basically expect the same moderator pattern for both dependent variables, although we expect the moderator effect to be less pronounced for job satisfaction, given that job satisfaction beliefs are more distal to affective experiences at work.

H3a: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional dissonance and general well-being. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker

association between emotional dissonance and general well-being than for employees low in emotional competence.

H3b: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional dissonance and job satisfaction. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association between emotional dissonance and job satisfaction than for employees low in emotional competence.

The moderator effect of emotional competence on the relationship between work characteristics and outcomes

General well-being and job satisfaction might not only be affected by emotional dissonance but also by emotional demands and time pressure. It has been argued that higher emotional demands lead to an increased probability that an employee does not meet these standards (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Such a discrepancy between demands and actual display behavior is perceived as aversive and might negatively affect the way work and one's psychological state is being evaluated. In a similar vein, a chronic lack of time to complete the work task is psychologically exhausting and might lead to less job satisfaction and well-being (Garst et al., 2000; Teuchmann, et al., 1999).

We hypothesize that emotional competence moderates the relationships between the two work characteristics and the two outcome variables, as well. The reasoning for this assertion follows from the discussion above. Emotionally competent service employees deal more effectively with high emotional and time-related demands. They are able to reduce aversive states that result from these demands. Also, they might see the positive aspects of challenging work situations. Thus, the higher the work demands, the more evident the difference between high and low emotionally competent employees will become. Some support for the hypothesized moderator effect comes from Wong and Law's (2002) study in a managerial context. Unlike our

study, they considered the extent of emotional work as the moderator. Nevertheless, in line with our predictions, they found that the emotional intelligence/emotion work interaction term was related to organizational commitment and turnover intention.

H4a: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional demands and general well-being. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association between emotional demands and general well-being than for employees low in emotional competence.

H4b: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional demands and job satisfaction. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association between emotional demands and job satisfaction than for employees low in emotional competence.

H5a: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between time pressure and general well-being. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association between time pressure and general well-being than for employees low in emotional competence.

H5b: Emotional competence moderates the relationship between time pressure and job satisfaction. For employees high in emotional competence there should be a weaker association between time pressure and job satisfaction than for employees low in emotional competence.

Method

Sample, materials, and procedure

The results are based on data from 84 service employees in the German clothing retail business. The employees were approached during working hours by two research assistants and asked whether they would be willing to participate in a study about work demands in service professions. If they agreed they were given a questionnaire for themselves and another one for a peer. The employees were asked to give the peer questionnaire to a person who knew them well. After a period of three to five working days we returned to the stores to pick up the employees' questionnaires. The peer questionnaires were sent directly to us through the mail.

Of the 169 questionnaire packages that were handed out, 129 were returned (response rate 76%). From 84 of these employees peer questionnaires were also received (response rate 65%). Hence, results are only reported for this sample of 84 employees and peers. To test for a potential selection bias we compared the samples with and without peer ratings ($n = 84$ and $n = 45$, respectively) but found no significant mean differences in the study variables.

Fifty-eight percent of the employees were female. The mean age was 32.7 years ($SD = 11.3$). On average, the employees had 11.3 years of working experience in the retail business ($SD = 10.5$). The employees came from 51 different stores or departments. The average number of participating employees per store/department was 1.7 ($SD = 1.3$), with a range from 1 to 5. They worked in stores that sold mixed apparel (36%) or apparel exclusively for women (27%), men (30%), or children (7%). On average, each store/department had 12.2 employees ($SD = 10.5$). Of the peer sample, 54 percent were female and the mean age was 35.6 years ($SD = 13.3$). On average, the peers knew the employees for 9.8 years ($SD = 10.2$). When asked about their relationship to the employee, 35 percent of the peers characterized themselves as a "friend", 35 percent as "partner", 11 percent as "relative", 10 percent as "acquaintance", and 10 percent as "colleague".

There were no mean differences in the study variables (see below) when comparing the four store types and the five types of the peer's relationship to the employee.

Measures

Emotional demands. This measure was comprised of seven items from the "Frankfurt Emotion Work Scales" (FEWS; Zapf et al., 1999) that focused on three facets: how often does the employee have to show positive emotions (e.g., "Do you have to express positive feelings towards the customer?"), how often does the employee have to show empathy toward the customer (e.g., "How often do you have to be empathic toward the customer?"), and how often does the employee have to be sensitive to the emotions of the customer (e.g., "Is it important to know how the clients feel momentarily?"). Responses were provided on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .79.

Time pressure. Time pressure was measured with four items originally developed by Semmer (1982) and adapted to the service context. A sample item is "How often do you have to serve a customer faster than normal to get the work done?". Responses were provided on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .75.

Emotional dissonance. Emotional dissonance was measured by a three-item scale from the FEWS (Zapf et al., 1999). A sample item is "How often do you have to show emotions that do not correspond to your actual emotions?". Responses were provided on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *very often* (5). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .79.

General well-being. General well-being was measured with a nine-item scale by Bradburn (1969). Employees had to indicate how often they felt in a certain way during the last six months (e.g., "I felt depressed and very unhappy"). Responses were provided on a 5-point scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .80.

Job satisfaction. Job satisfaction was measured with a scale by Warr, Cook, and Wall (1979). The scale consists of 14 items assessing an employee's satisfaction with different aspects of the task and the work environment (e.g., opportunity to use skills, supervisor, pay, etc.). Responses were provided on a 7-point scale ranging from to *extremely dissatisfied* (1) to *extremely satisfied* (7). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .91.

Emotional competence. Self-report is a common method to assess affect-related skills. However, self-reports of individual skills have some well-known disadvantages. For example, they may be subject to social desirability or may reflect the self-identity rather than actual skills (Roberts et al., 2001; Spain, Eaton, & Funder, 2000). Moreover, we have to rely on the employees' self-reports of their work context. If self-reports would also be used to measure emotional competence, the probability of a percept-percept bias (Crompton & Wagner, 1994) would increase. To avoid these problems, we chose to measure emotional competence by asking peers to rate the emotional competence of the employees.

Emotional competence was measured using both previously published items and items newly developed for this study for each of the three indicators. This approach (i.e., using two scales for each indicator) allowed us to investigate the structure of emotional competence with confirmatory factor analyses (Marsh, Hau, Balla, & Grayson, 1998). *Perspective taking* was measured with the respective subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983). A sample item was "Before criticizing somebody, 'A' tries to imagine how he/she would feel if he/she were in their place". Cronbach's alpha for the seven-item scale was .75. The self-developed three-item scale assessing perspective taking (sample item "In general, 'A' is very good in taking the perspective of others") had an alpha of .81. The skill for *affective self-regulation* was measured by four items from the subscale "repair" of the Trait Meta Mood Scale (Salovey et al., 1994). Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .80. The self-developed three-item

scale assessing affective self-regulation (sample item, “‘A’ knows very well how he/she can maintain a good mood”) had an alpha of .81. The skill to *regulate others’ affect* was measured by five items from the emotional competence questionnaire developed by Schutte, Malouf, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden, and Dornheim (1998) and identified as part of a distinct scale by Ciarrochi et al. (2001) and Petrides and Furnham, (2000). Cronbach’s alpha was .84. The self-developed scale assessing the skill to regulate others’ affect (sample item, “In general, ‘A’ has the ability to influence other people’s emotions”) was .69. The response format of all six scales ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*absolutely*).

Confirmatory factor analyses were run to investigate the structure of emotional competence. Similar to Wong and Law (2002), we regard emotional competence to be a second-order construct which is comprised of interrelated first-order constructs. Thus, we first tested a model with three first-order factors and a second-order factor (i.e., emotional competence). Each latent first-order factor was measured by two “parcels”, that is, the established scale and the newly developed scale. The model provided only a moderate fit ($\chi^2 = 22.1$, $df = 11$, $p < .02$, GFI = .91, CFI = .93, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .11). Stepwise improvement of the model (partly following modification indices) resulted in an alternative model with two first-order factors and one second-order factor. The first first-order factor was formed by the two affective self-regulation scales, the second factor by the other four scales, namely, the established scale and newly developed scale for perspective taking and regulating other’s affect, respectively. The fit of this second model was good: $\chi^2 = 15.4$, $df = 10$, $p < .12$, GFI = .95, CFI = .97, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .08 (lower bound includes .00). This model provided a significantly better fit than the first model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 6.7$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .01$). We considered these results as justification to compute an overall scale of emotional competence (in the following *overall emotional competence*) as a composite measure of the two first-order factors. In addition, we computed a scale for each of the

two subdimensions: *emotional competence/internal* (composite of the two self-regulation scales), and *emotional competence/external* (composite of the two perspective taking scales and the two regulating others' affect scales). However, we want to emphasize that the composite measure of emotional competence is the main variable of interest, because – as we pointed out in the theory section – the components of emotional competence are intertwined. Thus, only when the overall measure of emotional competence emerges as a moderator we consider the results as supportive for our hypotheses. The results concerning the two subdimensions are displayed but should be considered as additional information of an exploratory character.

Additional analyses.

Results

Table 1 presents the intercorrelations of the study variables. Age and gender did not show significant relationships to the other variables. As could be expected, emotional demands and time pressure were both positively related to emotional dissonance ($r = .41, p < .05$ and $r = .32, p < .01$, respectively). However, both variables were unrelated to general well-being and job satisfaction. The correlations between emotional dissonance and general well-being and job satisfaction were only marginally significant ($r = -.19, p < .09$ and $r = -.21, p < .06$, respectively).

To test our moderator hypotheses we conducted hierarchical regression analyses. In the first step we entered the respective predictor and the moderator variable. In the second step the interaction term was entered. Following Aiken & West (1991) all predictors were centered. As potential moderators we tested all three forms of emotional competence, although – as mentioned above – we considered emotional competence/general as the moderator of main interest. Following the arguments of McClelland and Judd (1993) on the difficulties of detecting moderator effects in regression analysis, we also report results on the more liberal criterion of $p < .10$ as (marginally) significant. However, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Table 2 presents the standardized coefficients of the hierarchical regression analysis for hypothesis testing using the overall measure of emotional competence. For the two subdimensions the standardized coefficients of the interaction terms and the respective increment in explained variance are presented in Table 3. Figures of the interactions were plotted according to the procedure proposed by Aiken and West (1991). Three exemplary interactions are depicted in Figure 2.

Hypothesis 1a received marginal support. Overall emotional competence moderated the relationship between emotional demands and emotional dissonance only on a 10 percent significance level ($\beta = -.20; p < .07$). In addition, emotional competence/external emerged as a moderator ($\beta = -.24; p < .05$).

Hypothesis 1b predicts a moderator effect of emotional competence for the time pressure – emotional dissonance relationship and was supported for the overall emotional competence as well as for the two subdimensions (moderator overall emotional competence: $\beta = -.34; p < .01$; moderator emotional competence/internal: $\beta = -.22; p < .05$; moderator emotional competence/external: $\beta = -.35; p < .01$). Graphical inspection of the interaction (Figure 2a) shows that for employees low in emotional competence there is positive relationship between time pressure and emotional dissonance while there is a zero relationship for employees high in emotional competence.

Hypothesis 2a, which predicts that emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional dissonance and general well-being, was supported. Overall emotional competence emerged as moderator ($\beta = .24; p < .05$). Figure 2b shows that the significant interaction was in the predicted direction. Employees low in emotional competence show a stronger negative relationship between emotional dissonance and general well-being than employees high in emotional competence. The interaction terms involving the two subdimensions

were not significant. There was only marginal support for Hypothesis 2b, which predicts the same interaction for job satisfaction as the dependent variable. Overall emotional competence moderated the relationship only under a liberal significance criterion ($\beta = .19; p < .09$). The same holds true for emotional competence/external were moderators under the more liberal significance criterion ($\beta = .22; p < .07$)

Hypothesis 3a, which predicted that emotional competence moderates the relationships between emotional demands and general well-being, was supported. Emotional competence/general emerged as a moderator ($\beta = .32; p < .01$), as well as the two subdimensions (moderator emotional competence/internal: $\beta = .18; p < .08$; moderator emotional competence/external: $\beta = .32; p < .01$). Hypothesis 3b received no support. Neither the general measure of emotional competence nor the subdimensions emerged as a moderator of the relationship between emotional demands and job satisfaction.

Overall emotional competence as well as the two subdimensions moderated the relationship between time pressure and general well-being, thus supporting Hypothesis 4a (moderator overall emotional competence: $\beta = .32; p < .01$; moderator emotional competence/internal: $\beta = .23; p < .05$; moderator emotional competence/external: $\beta = .29; p < .05$). Hypothesis 4b was also supported. Overall emotional competence emerged as a moderator of the relationship between time pressure and job satisfaction ($\beta = .24; p < .05$). The plots of the interaction showed the buffer effect (see Figure 2c). While for low emotionally competent employees the relationship between time pressure and job satisfaction was negative, it was zero for high emotionally competent employees. The interaction terms involving the two subdimensions were marginally significant ($\beta = .20, p < .07$, and $\beta = .22; p < .06$, respectively).

Discussion

The objective of this study was to test the assertion that emotional competence can be regarded an important personal resource in service work because it affects the relationships between work characteristics, emotional dissonance, and outcome variables. More specifically, we argued that emotional competence functions as a psychological resource because it supports employees in their efforts to cope with emotional and time demands of their service work as well as with states of emotional dissonance. This is done mainly by the simultaneous processes of regulating one's own affect on the one hand (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983) and the affect of the customers on the other hand (Côté, in press). We tested our assertions along three sets of hypotheses and on the whole the findings supported our predictions.

First, we hypothesized that emotional competence moderates the relationship between two work characteristics (emotional demands and time pressure) and emotional dissonance. There was marginal support for the moderating role of emotional competence on the relationship between emotional demands and emotional dissonance and full support for the respective role on the relationship between time pressure and emotional dissonance.

There was some support for the second set of hypotheses, predicting that emotional competence moderates the relationship between emotional dissonance and the outcome variables (general well-being and job satisfaction). Emotional competence moderated the relationship between emotional dissonance and general well-being. The moderator effect for the relationship between emotional dissonance and job satisfaction was marginally significant.

With regard to the third set of hypotheses, there was some support for the assertion that emotional competence moderated the relationships between the two work characteristics and the two outcome variables. Three out of four interactions were significant.

In general, the moderating effects were somewhat stronger for emotional dissonance and well-being than for job satisfaction. One reason for this might be that job satisfaction is a more

cognitively oriented outcome variable than general well-being (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). In other words, there is a relatively smaller “emotional” part in job satisfaction than in well-being and, thus, emotional competence is less likely to make a difference. A second explanation could be that because both emotional competence and well-being are general variables there is a better “fit” between these two than between emotional competence and the job-specific job satisfaction.

In our opinion, these findings contribute to the literature in several ways. First, we supported the hypothesis that emotional competence can be regarded a psychological resource that buffers the negative association between emotion work and well-being. In general stress research there is a long tradition of identifying factors that protect or buffer employees against detrimental effects of demanding workplaces (e.g., Frese, 1999). In the domain of emotion work, however, this stream of research has only begun and this study adds to the limited number of studies (e.g., Schaubroek & Jones, 2000).

Second, we empirically integrated two research fields - emotion work and emotional competence. These two fields have obvious connections but typically they have only been related theoretically (Abraham, 1999; Grandey, 2000). In this context it should be noted that some conceptual overlap exists between the concepts of emotional competence and deep acting. The strategies to regulate an employee’s own affect may also be seen as part of deep acting strategies (Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Brauburger, 2002). Thus, one can argue that emotional competence is a dispositional basis for effective deep acting.

In an exploratory manner we also tested the moderator effects of two subdimensions of emotional competence: the “internal” dimension that deals with the regulation of the employee’s own affect and the “external” dimension that regards the affect of the customer. These analyses may help to understand the general findings.

We found the moderator effect of emotional competence/external somewhat higher than the effect of emotional competence/internal, although the direction is by and large similar for both dimensions. These results give credit to the notion that both self-regulatory strategies as well as customer-regulatory strategies are important for dealing successfully with the demands of service work. While the self-regulation path has received much attention in the past (e.g., Grandey, 2000), we agree with Côté's (in press) arguments for a stronger focus on the role of interactional and feedback processes in understanding emotional regulation. In the case of service encounters, for example, fostering a positive affective state in the customer- or at least assuaging a negative one – may help to avoid situations where emotion expression has to be faked by the employee (e.g., avoiding anger as a reaction to unfriendly customer behavior).

Third, we introduced time pressure as a traditional variable that has not been investigated before in the context of emotion work. The results might be interesting with regard to the role of time pressure at work. Because the negative effects of time pressure pose a problem in a wide array of occupations, the buffering role of emotional competence might also be valid outside the context of service work., For instance, executives might also utilize their emotional competence to reduce the intensity of negative emotions that accompany time pressure (e.g., fear of the consequences if a task is not completed in time) and, thus in doing so, contribute to a higher level of well-being.

The findings have to be discussed within the strengths and limitations of this study. A particular methodological strength of this study certainly lies in the use of peer ratings to measure emotional competence in order to circumvent disadvantages of self-reports in the measurement of skills and competencies (Spain et al., 2000). A limitation concerns the cross-sectional design of the study. Although we implied a certain causal order of the variables, other causal directions

could be possible as well. For example, while most studies considered job satisfaction as an outcome of emotion work, Grandey (2003) conceptualized job satisfaction as an antecedent for deep and surface acting. She argued that job satisfaction leads to a more positive mood at work which, in turn, decreases the necessity for acting. Both directions - job satisfaction as an antecedent and as an outcome – make sense theoretically. More likely than not, both paths work simultaneously. Future longitudinal studies might illuminate the reciprocal nature of these relations. A second limitation concerns the potential context specificity of the results. This study focused solely on service employees in the clothing business. Research in other service areas might yield different results. For example, it could be argued that in service occupations with low work autonomy, person-related resources might not be as important as in our context. For example, in fast-food restaurants, service interactions are short and rather predetermined. Thus, service employees face rather strong situations (Mischel, 1973), that is, there is not much room (or time) for individual mental or behavioral regulatory strategies to become effective. In these cases, resources that are related to the work environment (e.g., social support) might be more effective. Therefore, future research should look more closely at the implications of differences in the work structure for emotion work in general and for the differential functionality of resources in particular.

Our results have some practical implications. Research has shown a relationship between strain and turnover as well as between job satisfaction and turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000). To reduce costs that are associated with employee turnover, service industries that are very demanding in terms of time pressure and/or emotion work should take into account emotional competence when selecting or training their front-line employees. Emotional competence is a relatively stable disposition but, as the term “competence” implies, might also be

improved by training efforts. Evidence for this assumption comes from literature on stress management that shows that individuals can learn and apply affect-related strategies to reduce stress reactions (e.g., Meichenbaum, 1985; Roger & Hudson, 1995).

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Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations of Study Variables

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 Age	32.72	11.63									
2 Gender ^a	0.42	0.50	-.13								
3 Emotional demands	3.47	0.73	.14	.06	(.79)						
4 Time pressure	3.06	0.86	.19	.16	.30**	(.75)					
5 Emotional dissonance	3.37	0.94	-.04	-.14	.41**	.32**	(.79)				
6 General well-being	3.72	0.59	-.02	.00	.18	-.08	-.19	(.80)			
7 Job satisfaction	4.67	1.03	-.02	-.01	.17	-.18	-.21	.65**	(.91)		
8 Emotional competence/internal	3.46	0.66	.08	.08	.32**	.13	.01	.36**	.22*		
9 Emotional competence/external ^b	3.66	0.61	-.01	.02	.43**	.21	.24*	.04	.12	.53**	
10 Overall Emotional competence	3.56	0.56	.04	.06	.43**	.20	.14	.24*	.20	.88**	.86**

Note. Intercorrelations based on N = 79-84; ^a 0 = female, 1 = male

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Two-tailed tests.

Table 2

Results of the Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Independent variable	Dependent variable						
	Emotional dissonance		General well-being		Job satisfaction		
	β		β		β		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	Step 1	Step 2	
Emotional demands	.426**	.366**	.103	.189	.143	.197	
Overall emotional competence	-.042	-.046	.198 [†]	.194 [†]	.052	.080	
Overall emotional competence x emotional demands		-.197 [†]		.323**		.172	
	R^2	.168	.203	.066	.163	.030	.054
	ΔR^2		.035 [†]		.097**		.025
Time pressure	.301**	.357**	-.115	-.177	-.235*	-.273*	
Overall emotional competence	.081	.053	.259*	.271*	.242*	.249*	
Overall emotional competence x time pressure		-.337**		.316**		.236*	
	R^2	.107	.217	.070	.166	.091	.146
	ΔR^2		.110**		.096**		.055*
Emotional dissonance			-.211 [†]	-.234*	-.242*	-.259*	
Overall emotional competence			.261*	.308**	.225*	.263*	
Overall emotional competence x emotional dissonance				.237*		.190 [†]	
	R^2		.101	.155	.096	.130	
	ΔR^2			.054*		.034 [†]	

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Moderator Effects of the Subdimensions of Emotional Competence on the Relationship between Work Characteristics, Emotional Dissonance, and Outcome Variables (Standardized Regression Coefficients and R² Increments for Interaction Terms)

Relationship	Moderator variable			
	Emotional competence/internal		Emotional competence/external	
	β	ΔR^2	β	ΔR^2
Emotional demands → Emotional dissonance	-.07	.00	-.24*	.05*
Time pressure → Emotional dissonance	-.22*	.05*	-.35**	.11**
Emotional dissonance → General well-being	.16	.03	.20	.03
Emotional dissonance → Job satisfaction	.12	.01	.22 [†]	.04 [†]
Emotional demands → General well-being	.18 [†]	.03 [†]	.32**	.09**
Emotional demands → Job satisfaction	-.05	.00	.17	.03
Time pressure → General well-being	.23*	.05*	.29*	.08*
Time pressure → Job satisfaction	.20 [†]	.04 [†]	.22 [†]	.04 [†]

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1. Graphical depiction of hypotheses

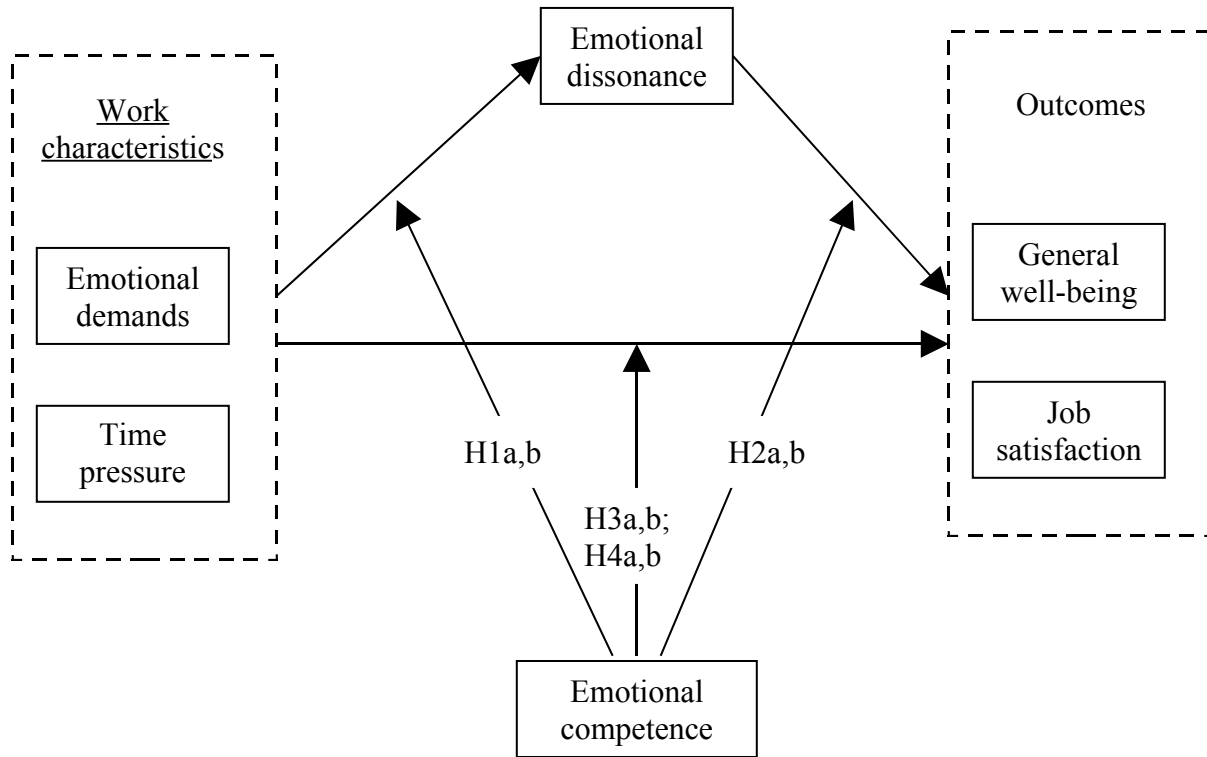


Figure 2. Graphical depictions of emotional competence moderator effects

